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## Spying Stories

While 74m people tuned in this week for the final episode of BBC television's "Smiley's People" (in which Karla, the Soviet spymaster, is persuaded to defect to the west), the newspapers have been full of two real-life spy stories. One, based on American sources, alleges that, yet again, British intelligence has been badly penetrated by the Soviet Union. The other, based on a terse statement from the home office, concerns Mr Vladimir Kuzichkin, a 35-year-old former vice-consul at the Soviet embassy in Teheran, who has been granted political asylum in Britain.

The rumour and speculation surrounding both has got a bit out of hand. For example, Mr Kuzichkin is a defector from the KGB. But he is not quite the "big fish" he has been portrayed. And, although Whitehall has known for some years that parts of Britain's codebreaking system had been compromised, it has not resulted in any agent's cover being blown or the location of Nato nuclear warheads disclosed, as some American newspapers have claimed.

Mr Caspar Weinberger, the American defence secretary, was closest to the truth when he said on October 26th:

It is a serious breach. There is no question of that. But I would not classify it as a catastrophe.

He should know. America's National Security Agency works hand in glove with British intelligence in a worldwide network of listening posts.

No British newspaper can report claims of Soviet penetration with any clarity. As the attorney-general, Sir Michael Havers, reminded the house of commons on Monday, a case is pending under section one of the Official Secrets Act, 1911 (the part that deals with espionage). The matter is sub judice. As for Mr Kuzichkin, Britain's secret intelligence service, MI6, has been debriefing him since June, learning a great deal about KGB operations in Iran and neighbouring countries in the process. Mr Kuzichkin is relatively young by the standards of Soviet bureaucracy, which is a gerontocracy. He has been able to provide some details about the KGB's central organisation and its methods, but not a great deal. His defection has given MI6 a welcome boost. But Mr Kuzichkin is not in the Karla class.